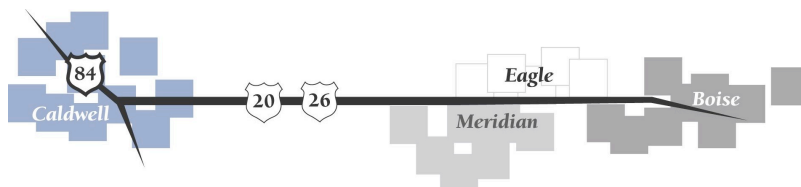




U.S. 20/26 Corridor Preservation Study

Frequently Asked Questions



The U.S. 20/26 Corridor Preservation Study is a partnership between the Community Planning Association of Southwest Idaho (COMPASS) and the Idaho Transportation Department (ITD). The study will identify future transportation improvements and ways to preserve future right-of-way between Boise and Caldwell.

General questions about U.S. 20/26

1. Why are ITD and COMPASS dividing the corridor into three different segments?

The study corridor includes 15 miles between Caldwell and Boise. The three segments (west, middle and east) have different land uses that influence the transportation strategies. For instance, the middle segment (Midland Road to McDermott Road) is rural, with large parcels of farmland. While the east and west end of the project area may appear to be rural, they are in urban impact areas. The urban/suburban areas on the east and west ends have existing or planned high-density land uses, including commercial and residential subdivisions adjacent to the highway.

2. Is U.S. 20/26 being planned as an expressway?

The definition of the word expressway varies throughout the U.S. It generally means a divided highway, with access control, intended for high-speed traffic. Some use the term interchangeably with freeway, and mean a route with grade separated interchanges (like I-84). The ability to convert this arterial corridor to a freeway, with no signals, is challenging due to fiscal constraints and impacts to existing and planned land use. The route, however, can be planned as a divided highway, with access control, and an emphasis on efficient travel time, minimizing future signalized intersections as much as possible, where possible. The future may see interchanges constructed at major crossroads, such as north-south crossings of the river.

3. How did you select the future traffic signal locations shown at your last public meeting?

The future signal pattern was planned to coordinate with comprehensive plans of the adjacent cities and counties. The cities of Meridian, Caldwell, and Eagle have planned for a half mile public street (arterial/collector) grid connecting to U.S. 20/26. Meridian and Caldwell have implemented access management ordinances which restrict access to half mile spacing on U.S. 20/26. As land along the U.S. 20/26 corridor is developed, traffic volumes

will increase, requiring signals at intersections to allow safer left turns to and from the highway.

Future signal spacing at one-mile intervals can allow for higher speed traffic progression. This may be proposed for the rural mid-section of U.S. 20/26 where the restricted access will not conflict with local government planning and the opportunity to develop parallel collector roads still exists.

Interchanges may be considered as a long term solution to accommodate the higher volumes on the north-south roads that cross the river.

Roundabouts are an interesting intersection design to avoid a stop condition. Roundabouts become more complex when both high traffic volumes and high speeds are involved. High speed/high volume roundabouts do not yet have an extensive track record and are not currently being considered for the U.S. 20/26 corridor.

4. What is an interchange?

An interchange is a structure that takes the crossing traffic over or under the highway. On-ramps or off-ramps provide access. Most people know an interchange as a “freeway exit” with an overpass and on- and off-ramps. The size of an interchange varies and depends on speed and traffic volumes.

5. What is the plan for frontage roads and circulator roads?

Parallel collectors, circulator roads, frontage and backage roads will be included in the Access Management Plan and reflected in city and county land use plans. These local roads will be constructed by developers as land use is upgraded. When access to the highway is restricted, a good system of circulator roads is necessary to provide alternate access to properties along the corridor. Parallel collectors will keep more local trips on the local system, reserving the capacity on the highway for longer distance trips.

6. What is COMPASS’ focus outside of the Boise and Caldwell urban areas?

COMPASS’ main function is to coordinate transportation planning and funding in the urban areas of Ada and Canyon counties. Areas surrounding Boise and Caldwell influence our transportation network and are impacted by things that happen here. It is hard to say where one system ends and the other begins. The local governments in Ada and Canyon counties are members of COMPASS. The regional long-range transportation plan adopted by COMPASS includes regional links and infrastructure beyond the two counties into Boise, Elmore, Gem and Payette counties.

Alternative Transportation (bike, pedestrian, pathways, transit)

7. Why are pathways being built on a state highway?

Due to high traffic volumes on this corridor, a pathway separate from automobile travel lanes is desired for the safety and comfort of bicyclists and pedestrians. The pathway would be wider than a typical sidewalk and would accommodate a variety of users. These pathways

can be implemented by local government, through the development process, or by the state during the highway construction.

8. Are bike lanes planned? Are transit lanes planned? Light rail? What can be done to reduce the number of single-occupancy vehicles using this corridor?

The highway shoulder will be wide enough to accommodate commuter cyclists. Recreational or less confident cyclists would be accommodated on the separated pathway. The Regional Long Range Transportation Plan and/or the Valley Regional Transit plans currently do not show plans for dedicated transit lanes or light rail on U.S. 20/26. The COMPASS Regional Long Range Transportation Plan does discuss light rail on the existing rail line. The U.S. 20/26 corridor will be designed, to the extent possible, so it does not preclude future transit opportunities for the corridor.

Impacts

9. How will traffic noise be addressed?

A computer model will estimate 2030 traffic noise levels based on the projected traffic volumes and future lane configuration. If impacts are identified, then mitigation measures (example - soundwall) must be considered and implemented, if feasible and reasonable. If noise mitigation measures are indicated, they will be included in the environmental document. The planned location of future noise mitigation treatments, such as soundwalls, will be presented at future public meetings. Those interested in the noise analysis process can contact the ITD project manager, or research at www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/noise/faq_noise.htm

Local governments have worked with ITD to require developers to construct berms to prevent future traffic noise impacts to those new developments.

10. Right of Way acquisition: When will the right-of-way be purchased? If landowners are displaced by the project, will they be adequately compensated so that they can purchase another home or property?

Except for hardship cases, we do not plan to acquire property until the environmental document is approved and the Federal Highway Administration issues a Finding of No Significant Impact. At that time, we will phase right-of-way acquisition as funding allows. A relatively small amount of money is currently budgeted for right-of-way. Until right-of-way acquisition is fully funded for a construction project, we anticipate making offers only to willing sellers.

A property owner is entitled to compensation when part or all of their property is acquired by the state. This compensation is generally measured by comparing the value of the property before and after the taking. The value of the property is based on an appraisal and the highest and best use of the property. For more detailed information, visit www.fhwa.dot.gov/realestate/ua/uafaqs.htm, or call 334-8300 to speak with an ITD right-of-way agent.

The Uniform Act provides important protections and assistance for people affected by federally funded projects. This law was enacted by Congress in 1971 to ensure that people whose property is acquired, or who move as a result of projects receiving Federal funds, will be treated fairly and equitably and will receive assistance in moving from the property they occupy. Idaho Code (7-711A, 7-711, and 54-4105(5)) also addresses the property rights of owners.

Impacts to property that do not require property acquisition, such as to landscaping, irrigation, etc., will be mitigated by replacement in kind during construction, or otherwise compensated for damages.

If your property is adjacent to U.S. 20/26, we recommend staying informed about the project and in contact with ITD staff so you understand the future schedule and process for right-of-way acquisition.

11. Will irrigation rights be honored?

Yes. If improvements to the highway displace an irrigation canal, ITD will restore the canal to carry the same volumes of water.

Funding

12. Why not make U.S. 20/26 a toll road?

At this time, tolling is a more feasible option for the interstate where access to the highway is restricted. This may change as technology advances.

13. What improvements will be made to the corridor while funding is being identified for the long-term improvements? Are improvements planned during the next five years?

ITD anticipates some minor improvements to the corridor, such as adding turn lanes and safety features. In some cases, local highway districts and cities work with developers and ITD to add turn lanes, traffic signals and other necessary features that serve developments adjacent to the roadway.

14. What have other high-growth communities successfully done to address similar issues to those we have with the U.S. 20/26 corridor?

Federal funds are a major source of funding for many regions in the U.S. Those funds decrease every year, and the formulas and rules for distributing the money seem to work against areas with high growth rates. In the Las Vegas and Salt Lake City regions, the state legislatures have permitted local residents to vote on whether or not to raise gas taxes and other fees to fund transportation improvements. In some cases, the voters did approve an increase. Many of the improvements in northern Utah and southern Nevada over the past 15 years would have been impossible to build without actions of state legislatures and local voters. Virtually all of the funds for the beltway under construction around Las Vegas have come from local gas taxes.

15. What is the most likely source of new revenues to fund the improvements to U.S. 20/26?

Any “new” source of revenue, which includes increases in existing revenues, must first be approved by the appropriate legislative body. For state highway systems, that would be the Idaho State Legislature. The Idaho Transportation Board’s Forum on Transportation Investment has explored several options for Idaho’s funding needs.

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